

Presentation of Portrait

by

Richard T. Lunger III

May it please the Court:

Good afternoon Chief Justice Parker and distinguished members of the Court, I am honored to be here today on behalf of the Pless family who has asked me to prepare this statement and present this honorable Court with this portrait of Justice Pless prepared by Bradley Stevens.

I am Justice Pless' great-grandson and knew Justice Pless only as a child. As the Court will recall, the single most important thing in his life were the people of his beloved Blue Ridge Mountains. Although in countenance he appeared a tall, stern and domineering man, he was in fact a very patient and compassionate man whose modest, warm and polite demeanor endowed him with many close and lasting friendships over a broad socio-economic spectrum. His kind, nimble and energetic wit was always at the forefront, whether at home or on the bench. He was also a driven man with a strong work ethic. He was productive in pursuit of his career and in service of his community, and in particular of Southwestern North Carolina, which he really never wanted to leave.

Justice James William Pless, Jr., "Will" to his friends, or simply "Judge" to his family, was born in the mountain city of Brevard, North Carolina on July 1, 1898 to James William Pless, Sr. and Annie Miller Pless. He and his brother Edwin J. Pless grew up in Marion, McDowell County, North Carolina. His father was a distinguished lawyer and mayor of both Brevard and Marion. Much of his childhood was spent traveling from law office to law office with his father. Judge later explained he became a lawyer because that was what his father did and he never really considered anything else. By the time he graduated from Marion High School in 1913 he had already spent several years reading the law with his father. After high school he attended Davidson College, named after one of his ancestors, Gen. William Davidson of the Revolutionary War, and graduated from Chapel Hill in 1917. After serving in the United States Army as a corporal during World War I, he attended and graduated from law school at Chapel Hill in 1919. That same year he received his law license and joined the firm of Pless, Winborne and Pless where his father continued teaching him the practice of law. He was in private practice for only five years when he was appointed the 18th District Solicitor by Gov-